

BUILDING THE CONGREGATION

W. C. SKEATH

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BUILDING THE CONGREGATION

A STUDY
OF APPEALS

W. C. SKEATH



THE METHODIST BOOK CONCERN
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I. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE CHURCH

THE words "audience" and "congregation" are not synonymous, though frequently so used. Both signify gatherings of persons at a specially designated place for a definite purpose, but a congregation differs from an audience in the more specific content of the purpose for which they are gathered. The functioning organ of an audience is primarily the ear; that of the congregation is the heart. A congregation is a gathering whose essential purpose is to engage in acts of worship; and persons composing a congregation are listeners only in proportion as the music, the address, or singing to which they give their attention is thought of as a part of such worship, or as so instructing the worshiper as to give a deeper meaning and a greater efficiency to his worship. Not only has a congregation

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this more limited purpose, but it has an element of permanence which cannot be supposed to inhere in an audience. The concert, the lecture, the oratorio are things which are of passing interest. Their rendition accomplished, they have served their purpose of mental stimulation or of entertainment and pass on to some other field. It is different with worship, which carries with it an idea of continuance. Worship is ordinarily thought of as having a continual claim on the individual, a claim which cannot be satisfied in an hour of time, but is, supposedly, a real part of the life plan of the worshiper.

This distinction between an audience and a congregation must be kept in mind in any consideration of the objective of the church. No matter what may be the form of doctrine or type of truth stressed by any denomination or sect, the ultimate object of its efforts must not merely be the assembling of audiences; it must be the building of a

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congregation which shall so sufficiently believe these doctrines as to live by them. An audience is soon dissipated; and if there is to be a permanence to the work, the impulse to attend its gatherings must be such an impulse as will give to the service of the church a continuity such as, for example, is not found in the theater or lecture platform audiences; and such an impulse, further, as will assist in the general effort of making church attendance a habitual part of the individual's life. In the pursuit of this, which is the real objective of the church, elaborate organizations have been formed, vast sums of money expended, commodious buildings erected, and great social agencies brought into being. The church always has realized that it must not only proclaim what it has considered needful truth, but that this needful truth must be so proclaimed as to be heard by an increasing number of adherents—a number, further, whose

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growth must be commensurate, not alone with holding its own, but with adequately impressing the increasing population so that a greater and greater percentage of the community may come under the influence of the peculiar religion taught and abide by its precepts. It presupposes a certain need in both the individual and the race, a need undying from age to age, increasing with the increasing complexity of life, and which can be met only by a continuous and increasing dedication of life to the specific answers proposed by the church for those needs.

Now, it is precisely this necessity for accumulating an increasing number of adherents which has constituted a very real problem for organized Protestantism. It is a question whether any nation can be divided strictly into saint and sinner. The faith of all peoples is colored by the particular religion which has been received by tradition and inheritance, and even missionary effort

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must take cognizance of this since the convert must accept the new faith largely in terms of his concept of the old. The better classification would be into the actively religious and the passively religious—by passively religious meaning, of course, that element of the population which accepts the current conceptions of the God generally preached but in no real sense worshipping them. It is true, as Leuba says, “that in every society there is always a large number of people who live in the limbo of organized religion. They are open to the influence of religious agents in whom they believe more or less cold-heartedly without entering into definite or fixed relations with them.” And this passivity, in our present time certainly, continues in varying degree up to the very center of the church itself. To transform this passive element into an active constituency; to make over this mass of people who have inherited the religious traditions and teachings of

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their race without becoming active participants in and workers for these teachings, has been the task to which the church of whatever form has had to address herself. Such terms as awakening the sinner, spreading the truth, etc., have been symbols under which the church has conceived its task of turning this mass of indifference into the warmth of a worshiping congregation. It is our purpose now to consider some of the methods by which the church has addressed herself to this task.

II. A VARIETY OF APPEALS

This study is not concerned with the various dogmas of Protestant sects nor the validity of those dogmas. It does recognize, however, that whatever their difference of doctrine, they have, in the matter we are considering, a similar problem, and that, to a degree, the methods of solution have been common to all.

PREACHING

What probably ought to receive our first attention is the method of preaching the doctrines of the denomination in organized services. The validity of the method under certain conditions must be acknowledged. If the particular doctrines preached or believed in be such as will meet a real or supposed need on the part of the population; if, further, they be joined to certain social and psychological conditions suited for

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their acceptance, no better way can be secured than this for the gathering of a congregation. The persons to whose peculiar temperament the teaching is suited, recognizing its validity, will give their adherence to its principles, and a congregation will result. These elements have been—though they may not now be—in the problem. In the beginning of Protestantism the masses received from it a new and higher conception of God than was in the old teaching. The teaching was further enforced by martyrdom, a most startling way of bringing it to the attention of men. There were certain social and psychological conditions extremely favorable. The paucity of opportunity for social intercourse save as offered by the services of the church; the prevalence of the fear idea, upon which in its appeal to future punishment the teachings were grounded; all these things gave preaching a very valid and growing hold upon communities and

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made it valid in the building of congregations.

The drawing power of preaching to-day is open to question. To say this is not to question the character of the preaching of to-day nor the strength of the argument or appeal used in present-day sermons, upon what is esteemed as valid truth. It is simply to say that as a method of attracting persons to a gathering it has lost its old-time power. It is simply to assert that while the preaching may be valid in the instruction of a congregation once gathered, it is of little force in the gathering of the congregation primarily. People are not generally attracted by the announcement of a preacher nor of his subjects unless the speaker be so unusual and widely known a character as to attach to himself an unusual interest, or the subject so bizarre and sensational as to fall outside the rank of accepted standards. Those persons who are sometimes heard to say that

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people will crowd to hear the preaching of what they are pleased to call the "old gospel" are still looking for a form of the miraculous which has been relegated to the limbo of superstition. Of course there will be brought to our attention at once the great tabernacle campaigns. And these will be pointed out as a proof of the drawing power of the preaching of the old doctrines, and the power of such preaching to transform the multitudes thus gathered into a congregation. In reply it may be said that it's true such campaigns do draw large crowds; but these crowds are more likely the result of a careful and intelligent press work, joined to a public curiosity aroused by the personal peculiarities of the evangelist. It may also be questioned whether the permanency of the gathering which is an important element of a congregation can be predicated of his results.

It should be remembered further that the conditions socially and psychologi-

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ically under which the truth is now proclaimed are vastly different from the days when the accepted doctrines had so much force. Life is infinitely busier and there are many more methods of satisfying the social instincts of the people. The telephone, electric car, rural delivery, the automobile have in a large degree rendered obsolete the church gathering as a place for social intercourse so much needed by man. The old element of fear too, upon which so much of the appeal of the "old gospel" was based, has to a large degree ceased to be active in the minds of the people. In a certain gathering of ministers discussing the question of church growth a very active and successful preacher and pastor said: "I used to be able to secure conversions every time I preached on hell. Now I preach on the subject and secure no results whatever." The truth is that much of the success of the old type of preaching was due to its appeal to

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future punishment, a thing which if we are to believe the actions of Christians to-day is of very little strength in their consciousness. One very seldom sees any manifestation of the old concern on the part of Christians over the "lost" condition of their children or their friends.

Let us again repeat: We are not concerned with the validity of the doctrines summed up in the phrase "preaching the old gospel" or in the validity of any of the doctrines or principles upon which the church has insisted. We are simply stating that with changed social conditions and the absence of a fear motive persons are not generally rushing to hear them preached.

PASTORAL VISITING

Another method of gathering a congregation has in some quarters been insisted upon with considerable emphasis. It is that of pastoral visiting.

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By this we do not mean that ministry of comfort and assistance to those who are in sorrow, sickness, or trouble of whatever sort. This is a Christian obligation, whether it result in a congregation or not, an obligation fulfilled in the usual case without any thought of such reward. We refer to the personal visit of the minister to those in the community who are not attendants at the service in order to induce their attendance. Relying in the outset on the preaching of his new ideas of truth and worship for the gathering of his adherents, John Wesley very quickly found it expedient to declare: "And what avails public preaching alone though we could preach like angels? We must; yea, every traveling preacher must instruct the people from house to house." In accordance with this ideal, his preachers made much of visiting the homes of the community, giving spiritual advice and warning to all persons thus met; and to this day the Methodist

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Church asks of all who enter her ministry, "Will you visit from house to house?" Like the preaching of the doctrines which it enforced, this new method of attack was successful because it took into account the conditions of the times.

What were the conditions thus favorable to pastoral visiting as a means of congregation-building? Several may be mentioned. The large degree of sanctity attached to the minister. His education and peculiar office secured for him from the large part of the population a respectful hearing. The scarcity of books and newspapers and the rare visits of strangers added to the social value of his visits. These things gave the minister an entree to the home and a welcome to the community. The stage of religion on the part of the people was that of primitive credulity; faith resting chiefly upon an authority which makes appeal to no argument, but merely to the mind's

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natural and primitive credulity. Such a state is one in which men will quite freely discuss spiritual experiences and quite freely lay bare and touch each other's souls. Fear too as a motive was not entirely conquered, and all these combined to make the new method an available one.

Here too conditions have changed, and in the change pastoral visiting has been robbed of a great degree of its effectiveness. Some churches, picturing in their action the natural conservatism of the church, will still insist upon a minister "who is a pastor," but in spite of such insistence it is evident that under present conditions pastoral visiting is robbed of much of its usefulness as an agency in increasing the congregation.

First, it is no longer supported by the old idea of the sanctity of the minister. More and more the ministry is becoming a profession as men are beginning to recognize the sacredness of

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all callings. The visit from the pastor has become a professional thing, a business act, and is no longer conceived of as a thing disinterested.

Second, pastoral visiting is increasingly inefficient and that for two reasons. The "old primitive credulity has given way to a type of religious feeling which, calm and spontaneous, is the possession of people in many stages of culture, thoroughly normal and sane, who believe themselves to have an immediate apprehension of a larger life encircling theirs." To such the rude uncovering of deep spiritual feeling, the laying bare of the soul is obnoxious. Consequently, the old type of experience meeting has decayed. To such the pastor may come once with his probe and his insistence upon church attendance. That is his professional duty. But to repeat that call and that urge soon changes to nagging, and the result aimed at is defeated. The inefficiency is further displayed by the

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fact that the method makes too much of a demand on the time of the pastor. Even if all his energies were devoted to the task, it would require more time and energy than the pastor can give to meet the requirement of his own field without touching the broader field of the passively religious.

RELIGIOUS PUBLICITY

In our day a comparatively new force has been called to the aid of preaching and pastoral visiting to secure for the church the hearing which is felt needed for the truth. We refer to the growth of advertising and the tendency to use this new force in Christian propaganda. It remains for us to examine the grounds upon which this new force is presented as a means of propaganda in the building of a congregation, the methods of its present use, and the reasons, if any, through which we may hope for its success

The hopes of those who have advo-

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cated publicity as a means of congregation attraction grow (1) out of the marvelous success attending the use of such newspaper publicity in the business world; (2) out of the sense of need arising from the falling congregations in the second place; and (3) out of the realization of the fact that in the newspapers and magazines is offered an avenue of approach to the masses of the passively religious who have closed their ears to the sermon subject and their doors to pastoral visitation. These grounds it would seem are valid. Great businesses have been developed through publicity. New inventions and little-known—sometimes almost useless—products have been given a wide sale. Such business enterprises as the Curtis Publishing Company and such articles as talking machines are witnesses to the power of publicity in the realm of business. The opinions of the masses of the people have been molded by publicity, as wit-

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ness England's recruiting of her army. Congregations are growing smaller, and more and more it would seem that the masses are embracing what Donald Hankey calls the religion of the inarticulate—accepting church virtues without articulating them to the churches. Newspapers and magazines are found in every home, making it possible to force, unobtrusively, but none the less insistently, whatever article or system is admitted into the advertising columns into the very privacy of individual life. Small wonder that in the past few years a number of books have been written on the subject of religious publicity, and that a number of preachers have felt themselves obligated to inform their brethren and the church of the excellent results supposed to have been attained through this new method.

In another section we shall consider our belief that this new force may eventually be a useful method of at-

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tracting, not audiences simply, but congregations to the church. For the present let us point out what seems to be a just criticism on the method as it is being used by the church. The criticism is this: Publicity as used is not tending toward building up congregations, but tends, rather, to the disintegration of congregations, since it puts its main emphasis upon something which is but a temporary and unessential feature of the church gatherings.

The distinction between an audience and a congregation made at the outset of this study must here be kept in mind. The population, and especially that part of it which is passively religious, must not only be attracted to the church, but must be attracted in such a way as to be permanently attached to its services. This implies two considerations. First, the impulse given to attend the service must be such as shall create an expectancy in

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harmony with the worshipful purpose of the church. And, second, the impulse must be such as to arouse an expectancy which the church will have no difficulty in permanently satisfying. Putting the matter in another form, we may say that the church cannot indefinitely manufacture "red-letter" days and "special" services; cannot continually put the emphasis on the special music or sermon. To do so would be finally to rob the church of its essentially religious character and put it into competition with a host of agencies like the Lyceum Bureau, the opera house, the picture theater, etc., which are better equipped for such service, and which in the end must displace the church in their chosen field. And growing out of this is the fact that, making its appeal to special feature, the time must inevitably come when a service will be held in which these things will be lacking, and as a result disappointment caused to a con-

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stituency trained to look for such special feature. Such a disappointment cannot but defeat the very end at which the appeal was aimed.

A careful study of religious display advertisements in the public prints, and of the announcements made of services in the religious columns of Saturday papers would lead a candid examiner to feel that almost the whole appeal of the church in its use of this new force is that of special sermon, special music, unusual or "timely" services. But little attempt is made to arouse religious feeling. No adequate conception seems prevalent as to the permanent elements of the service which might be attractive to the average reader. The whole tenor is that of specialty advertising, and as such is calculated to attract audiences possibly, but certainly not to develop congregations. Crowds may be gathered for the time being, but worshipers hardly.

That this criticism may lodge against

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current methods of religious publicity is being made evident by the number of warning voices which are beginning to make themselves heard and by the testimony elicited as to the consequences resulting from such publicity appeals after a stretch of time. William T. Ellis, writing in a religious periodical, says: "I recently asked the editor of one of the great denominational organs, published in a metropolitan city, about the work of one of the pastors in his communion who is a well-known advocate of publicity. 'Well,' he replied, with a quizzical smile, 'Dr. X. competes successfully with the other amusement enterprises of his neighborhood!' Then he proceeded to explain that while by high pressure and extensive advertising, Dr. X. fills his auditorium, especially on Sunday evenings, yet he is not building up a real church; he merely attracts the light-minded transients who still have so much conscience or so little courage

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that they are unwilling to break entirely with the traditional habit of church-going. Dr. X.'s previous pastorate was, so my informant continued, of the same sort; but he left for his successor a mere shell of a church, and the man who followed him has had a sorrowful time. Dr. X. had by methods that are bizarre and sensational attracted audiences, but he had not built up a congregation." This is almost identical with our criticism, and the testimony could be duplicated from other sources. Our contention is not indeed that, as Mr. Ellis seems to think, all the present use of publicity is according to bizarre and sensational methods, but that the appeal is made to a wrong, that is, a nonreligious, element or desire in humanity, and that from the side of the service the emphasis is placed upon elements that are unessential.

III. A BASIS FOR APPEAL

Accepting these criticisms upon the present mode of religious publicity, it remains to inquire whether this force, having, as it does, so free an entrance to the minds and homes of the passively religious, may be so used as to appeal to permanent religious elements, and to appeal in such a way as to furnish an incentive which attendance at church services can continuously satisfy. To this question, it is our belief, an affirmative answer can be given. If the motives underlying religious action be discovered, and the appeal be directed to those motives in harmony with church practice and purpose, we feel that publicity may be a very useful agent in gathering congregations for the church.

Religious action of whatever sort is a species of behavior, and as such the underlying forces may be investigated and

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more or less definitely formulated. Just as the investigator of animal action may get a clear idea of the force of hunger in producing animal action, so the investigator of religious behavior may secure a knowledge—not so accurate, certainly, since the conditions of the experiment cannot be so surely regulated—of the forces which may enter into or may be employed in producing religious action. Among the forces producing such religious action we may cite Social Solidarity, Moral Feeling, and the Sense of Life's Incompleteness. These factors in their various ramifications may be appealed to in turn in the building up of congregations. Let us examine them in a little closer detail.

SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

Men tend to act in crowds. It is the very unusual individual indeed who is strong enough to break social tabu by defying the customs made valid by

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the majority. That action which in the past has been, or has seemed to be, most helpful in securing human wants either of food or pleasure of any kind is the action upon which mankind sets the mark of approval and establishes as a custom. The various tabus illustrate this, and it is further seen in the fact that to act alone renders one conspicuous and is therefore disagreeable; to act as others are acting is acceptable and even pleasant. To eat one's lunch in a crowded railway car is distasteful, but to eat in the dining car where others are doing the same thing is not at all objectionable. The reasons for such action are a special subject for psychology and do not here concern us. But it is evident that men act religiously in much the same fashion as in other customs. Those systems which have survived because of their success in attaining religious objectives become part of the inheritance of the race; and strengthened by tradition and

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accepted largely on its authority become the almost instinctive belief of whole peoples. Men believe what their fathers believed, and a new faith is possible only in proportion as it assumes the terms of the old or is more or less incorporated with the old beliefs, adding its leaven to the old, but not, except after long periods, entirely supplanting it. Christianity was grafted upon Judaism, then later on Grecian and Roman ideas, and in its missionary propaganda is accepted even now only in concept of the old gods of the races to whom Christianity is presented. To the old ideas are added the new concepts of Christianity, making in the process what may be called a new faith. The voice of the people is in a real sense the voice of God, since the voice of the people is the utterance of the consensus of the race, a consensus which determines the action of the race deity. It will be seen that here is the justification of the statement in a

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previous paragraph that it is not possible to classify a population strictly on the line of saint and sinner. The classification must be effected along the line of activity or passivity in the religion accepted by the population as a whole.

Now the significance of these facts for our study is here: that the individual thought is more or less a matter of the race thought; that the individual conscience is a picture, possibly more or less blurred in outline, of the general community conscience. That is wrong which the consensus of opinion makes tabu and that is right which has become an established custom. To arraign, then, a man at the bar of his own conscience is powerful, but to arraign a man at the bar of the public or social conscience is to bring him into a court from which little appeal can be made. The problem of church attendance from this point of view is not that of enriching or varying the

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service with special feature, but the greater problem of making the individual feel that regardless of the character of the service he is conforming to the decision of the majority when he becomes an attendant at church worship.

MORAL FEELING

The basis of all society is solidarity and reciprocity—the sense of the unity of the race and the sense that each individual in the race must so act as to contribute his part to the racial success in order that he himself may obtain the fullest opportunity for development. From the action of these two forces there has resulted what we may call moral feeling—in its highest expression a compound of emotion and intellect. The behavior induced by this moral feeling becomes an accepted standard of action in the community. This moral feeling in its progression is divided by Ribot into (1) sympathy,

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(2) altruism or benevolence, (3) the sense of justice, (4) the desire for approbation or for divine and human rewards, and the fear of disapprobation and punishments. The sense of fair play for the individual, the feeling of pity for those in suffering, the insistence on honesty in business dealings, the demand for truthfulness in social relations; all these things so thoroughly incorporated as they are into our present civilization are the final expressions of reciprocity and solidarity.

It will be noticed that this moral feeling is not to be confounded with organized religion, which may be—and sometimes has been—decidedly immoral. The probabilities are that these virtues would have become a part of society had there been no such thing as an organized religion. There have been men, who, to use Ribot's phrase, were "discoverers in morals—men who in moral disposition were far in advance

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of their contemporaries and who initiated and promoted reform in this department." These men may have been—frequently were—founders of systems that in the process of time have assumed all the prerogatives and forms of organized religion. The point we make is that moral feeling may exist, and has at times existed, apart from organized religion and certainly prior to and apart from our Christian system.

It is true, of course, that in our present day moral actions are the things insisted upon as the expression of religious experience, but it is also true that these moral feelings are a part of the life of that great part of the population which is only passively religious, and that in this part of the population these feelings even to-day exist in separation from our organized faith. The gathering of men into the camps has given religious workers an opportunity to more closely observe the

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moral feelings of the nation, and the general expression of these observers seems to be in harmony with Donald Hankey in *A Student in Arms*, when, after describing a conversation among the soldiers, he says: "[I heard] enough to convince me that the soldiers—and in this case the soldier is the working-man—does not in the least connect the things that he really believes in with Christianity. He thinks that Christianity consists in believing the Bible and setting yourself up to be better than your neighbors. By believing the Bible he means believing that Jonah was swallowed by the whale. By setting up to be better than your neighbor he means not drinking, not swearing, and preferably not smoking, being close-fisted with money, avoiding the companionship of doubtful characters, and refusing to acknowledge that such have any claim upon you. . . . [The soldiers] were men who believed absolutely in the virtues of unselfishness,

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generosity, charity, humility, without ever connecting them in their minds with Christianity; and what they did associate with Christianity was just on a par with the formalism and smug self-righteousness which Christ spent his whole life trying to destroy." He says, further: "The men had deep-seated beliefs in goodness, and the only reason they did not pray and go to the communion was that they never connected the goodness in which they believed with the God in whom the chaplains said they ought to believe." And Hankey's conclusion seems to us a correct one when he says that the church "must begin by showing that Christianity is the explanation and the justification and the triumph of all that they do now really believe in; . . . must make men see that creeds and prayers and worship are symbols of all that they admire most and want most to be."

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THE INCOMPLETENESS OF LIFE

According to the analysis of the moral feeling which we have quoted from Ribot, the last degree of that feeling is the desire to secure divine or human approbation and to escape disapprobation and punishment. If this desire fail of realization, a sense of disappointment and of moral pain will result. We say moral pain because the pain not only will be the punishment feared, but that deeper pain we call remorse. It will be the result of a sense of loss in the failure to reach the ideal set by the moral feeling, and it will be intensified by the memory pictures of the struggles which must again be undergone in order to regain the thing lost through the failure. Man is ever pushed on by his desires, and is as constantly restrained by the forces about him. The conflict eventuates in the formation of an ideal of life for himself and others; an ideal which his con-

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stant failure to reach only makes the more desirable. It is the formation of a picture of what mankind ought to be—a picture whose details have been softened and harmonized by centuries of human history. The ideal has but once been realized, and out of the universal failure to realize it, and the memories of the struggle which those failures have involved, arise such various forms of moral pain as grief, remorse, ambition, aspiration, desires for friendship, for immortality, etc. Man desires to be rich, but by force of circumstances must in the average remain poor. Man desires that his friendships shall continue, but death intervenes or misunderstanding terminates it. Man wants pleasure, but the strict codes of the community and of his class, together with the increasing difficulty of securing a livelihood, make pleasure rare. He desires success in his business or profession, but it constantly eludes him. Small wonder, then, that there always should be the sense of shortcoming and

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the consciousness of life's incompleteness in human hearts. Small wonder also that in all ages men have devised systems which by various methods of mediation seemed to promise the attainment of the ideal and the completion of life's desires either in this or some future world.

This consciousness of the incompleteness of life, the sense of needs that are unsatisfied, of suffering that is inexplicable, of empty spaces in everyday experiences, is as potent in the life of the passively religious as in those who find an answer to them in religious activity. It is life fuller and larger that they need, and religion in its highest motive is designed to supply just that need. To put the worshiper in harmony with life, to reconcile the individual to his universe, to fill up the waste and empty spaces—those are the very things which religion claims as its supreme mission. Moreover, seeking those things in the church and finding

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only the husks of special solo or bizarre and unusual sermon subject, men will turn from the church to such places as they may feel will best meet these needs in their life.

IV. THE APPEAL UTILIZED

Can these elements of the life of the passive part of the population, which are so closely allied to the religious impulses, be effectively appealed to in religious publicity? Can the appeal to special feature now so common be shifted to an appeal to the more permanent elements in social constitution?

1. Advertising may be made to appeal to the principle of social solidarity. In our consideration of this principle we saw that the social conscience is a more potent court than that of the individual conscience. At present church attendance is largely a matter of individual preference and not of the community. The problem is that of taking the matter of church attendance out of the individual preference and making it a matter of social judgment. For the preacher to appeal to the individual for

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church attendance is passed over as a species of professional activity. For the attendant at the service to urge its consideration is to put the matter as a personal idiosyncrasy. But to give it the approval of society at large so that it shall be as excellent to attend church services regularly as it is to be honest in business will be to override personal inclination and antipathy. Is it possible to bring the matter before this last and powerful court?

In a small book entitled *High-Mark Congregations* Henry Gurting gives an account of an experiment in advertising which is worth study. The church advertised was located in a New England smaller city, in a "great community of well-meaning and respectable people." The congregations were relatively small and attendance at the service after the use of the usual methods of stimulation was showing the decline which has been so marked a characteristic of church life in recent years. The method of

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advertising chosen was in some respects unique. Small but attractive frames were used to display in shop windows and elsewhere cards advertising the church. A semimonthly paper was issued in which the first page was given over to a display advertisement in behalf of the church, and this paper was circulated in the community. After the experiment had been carried on a sufficient length of time, Mr. Gurting says the results are "an actual and steady increase in the church's congregations, an increase considerable, enduring, and continuing free from reacting weakness." The significance is in two features: first, that the appeal of this advertising was directed solely to the education of the public conscience in the matter of church attendance. No special feature in the church or its services was stressed. The church was mentioned only incidentally, but attendance at the church services was brought to the bar of

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public conscience and there received a favorable verdict. This was the second feature—the favorable verdict was not dependent upon the character of the music or sermon. The increase was not miraculous, but it was “considerable, enduring, and free from reacting weakness.”

The writer as matter of experiment placed in his church bulletin board the following words:

SENSIBLE PEOPLE

go to church
twice on Sunday—
Do You?

It was displayed for three days in a small community well churched, and as a result of the display not less than a dozen persons called upon the writer protesting the wording of the card. Every one of the persons so protesting was a person who habitually neglected the church services, and some of them

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had not been in a service for years. These people would not have been moved by an exhortation to attend service. But the words took the matter out of their hands and arraigned them supposedly before the bar of the public; insinuated that they were different from their fellows, and so aroused them to a consideration of the advisability of attending the services of the church. The appeal in the following advertisement was to the same principle, and in company with others in a similar vein was successful in its object:

DO YOU REALIZE

the meaning of last week's statement that 700 more persons were present in our services last month than in the same month last year? It means that your friends are finding our services pleasant, helpful, friendly. Meet your friends there next Sunday and be helped by the service.

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

BUILDING THE CONGREGATION

2. Religious publicity may be given a definite force by an appeal to the moral feeling in a community. While it is true that in a strict sense morality is not religion, and that the actions we have discussed under the head of moral feeling may arise independently of religion, it is at the same time true that to-day religion is functioning in actions that are moral. More and more the stress of faith is being placed upon matters of moral action, and the depth and sincerity of religious profession are being judged by its expression in moral and ethical deed. Sympathy, benevolence, justice, fair dealing, honesty, etc.—these things to the average churchgoer are almost synonymous with religion, though, as we saw above, to the outsider they are simply the common obligation of life and not at all articulated with the church. If in the minds of the masses these virtues can be tied up with the idea of the church, they will be of value to religious propaganda.

THE APPEAL UTILIZED

The various means of publicity, entering into the privacy of the home and having the ear of the reader in his quiet moments, furnish the means and can carry a message which will suggest that this common morality is a very definite part of the life of the church, and that, desirable as it is, is best secured in effort through the activity of the church. That this appeal may be made through the press and other publicity agencies may be seen in the following advertisements which have appeared in newspapers:

EXAMINE THE RECORD

of over one hundred years of continuous service of the Methodist church in this community. You will find it has always stood for the things that help the common people. It deserves your support.

CONVINCE YOURSELF

of the helpfulness of its work and the excellence of its services by being present next Sunday.

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

—The—Church—That—Serves—

BUILDING THE CONGREGATION

1801———1917

116 YEARS OF CONTINUOUS HISTORY

There must be something worth while in an organization that lasts as long as that. That something is: This church has ministered impartially to all classes. It has been a church for all the people. Considering all men equally entitled to its privileges, it has stood insistently for an honest worship of God and has welcomed all who sought to help their fellows. To belong to such an institution is at once an obligation and a privilege.

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

—The—Church—That—Serves—

THE SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY

Churches like persons have an individuality—a definite spirit. The spirit of the pioneers who laid broad and deep the foundations of Methodism in this section was the spirit of Religious Democracy. With them every man stood on the same footing before God. This spirit they bequeathed to their successors and is characteristic of our church to-day. Our doors stand open in genuine friendliness to all who desire to worship God.

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

THE APPEAL UTILIZED

3. However, it is in the sense of the incompleteness of life that there will be found the largest opportunity for appeal through religious publicity. Religion purports to be a ministry to just those lacunæ which we have seen are part of the experiences of men. These vacant spaces in life furnish the reason for religion. To comfort in sorrow, to render full the empty life, to atone for failure of ambition, to assure a future realization of the unsatisfied aspiration—these are the promises of the faith most widely preached. It would seem that with so extensive a need on the part of men, and such a full supply for those needs in the possession of the church, there would be a greater appeal to these elements than can be found in the various attempts at religious publicity.

In his study of advertising Professor H. L. Hollingworth has made an investigation into the force of certain incentives which may be used in advertising. Fifty different appeals were

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given to a group of forty observers who arranged the appeals in a final order of merit as they impressed the observer. This final order he gives in a table of values of the appeals and incentives. The table begins with health as the strongest appeal possible and continues on through a list of thirty incentives. In the order of strength his appeals fall into three groups, classified on the basis of the strength of the appeal. [In the first group are those that "are strictly relevant in tone, describe some specific value, quality, or selling point." In other words, the appeal is a personal appeal to the actual or supposed need of the individual. The second group consists of those "appeals which try to connect the article with some specific instinct or effective conception. They are less personal, but more social than the first group." In the third group—that which has the least force of all—"the feeling appealed to is indeterminate and general." He says: "Taking

THE APPEAL UTILIZED

the table as it stands, the various instincts and interests there represented stand in their order of strength so far as they may serve as the basis of appeal in business transaction regardless of the commodity offered. . . . It is only necessary to begin at the top of the list and select the first appeal which could be applied to the description of the commodity in question. This, then, will constitute the strongest appeal which can be made in the interest of that commodity."

The thing of unusual interest for us in these conclusions of Hollingworth is that the strongest basis of appeal is found in the personal and instinctive needs of the individual. As far as religion is concerned these needs are the things which will make life more complete. Here, then, is a strong basis for any appeal that we may make. That these things can be worked out in religious publicity the following advertisements bear witness:

BUILDING THE CONGREGATION

Spend Sunday Healthfully

Get mental stimulus, bodily comfort and spiritual help by regular attendance at the services of the

**Methodist Episcopal
Church**

The Church That Serves

Does Sunday Count?

Does Sunday with you count for success? Does it help you think clearly and live better?

You can make Sunday count for something by attending the services of our church. The series of sermons on "Getting the Most Out of Life," which is being preached in the evening, are especially planned to help you to success.

10:30 "With Open Eyes."

7:30 "The Rules of the Game"

(3d sermon of series)

Methodist Episcopal Church
The Church That Serves.

THE APPEAL UTILIZED

A Personal Attitude Toward Life

"My body needs food, my soul needs God. I will be as fair to my soul as to my body. I will work for my daily bread and on Sunday I will be found twice a day in a church service, where the helpful sermons and pervading spirit of worship will be to my soul what food is to my body.

10:30—"The Meaning of Life."

7:30—"If."

Methodist Episcopal Church

The Church That Serves

Week After Week

Hundreds of hearts and homes are made brighter and cheerier by the inspiration towards better living received at our services. They have appreciated the welcome, enjoyed the fellowship, been profited by the sermons. Try it for yourself.

10:30, **Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.**

7:30, **"The Final Judgment."**

Methodist Episcopal Church

The Church That Serves

BUILDING THE CONGREGATION



THAT FAMILY OF YOURS

deserves the very best you have. Give them the best thing you can, the heritage of a good name. You will find our services very helpful in securing that character which must be back of every good name. Let us help you thro our services on Sunday.

Methodist Episcopal Church
The Church That Serves

V. CONCLUSION

It must not be supposed that the religious publicity here outlined will be a magic wand useful in the creation of assemblies. On the contrary, for any particular and special service announced it will fail to produce the crowds that the usual type of church announcements might obtain. Such customary publicity makes its appeal to a desire for sensation, and to a type of persons, actively religious, who may be swayed from one church to another; and so such publicity may for a particular service secure a larger hearing. The obtaining of crowds, however, is not the main object of the type of publicity we have been considering. Its purpose is to touch the great mass of the passively religious by the indirect method of printed suggestion. Its purpose is that in the minds of these passively religious the church

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may be so connected with the ordinary virtues of life and with the permanent religious elements of society as to produce a constituency, recruited from the passive part of society, which will have a continuous trend toward church attendance and so have a permanent character which is the very opposite of the crowd.

Furthermore, such religious publicity will have in it a much larger degree of that vicarious element which inheres in all publicity than is found in the usual announcement of special service, special music, etc. By vicarious element we mean the indirect effect which the advertising of one kind of article has in increasing the sale of another article similar in kind but different in name. No particular brand of soap, for example, may be advertised extensively without indirectly stimulating the sales of other brands of soap, so no religious publicity for a particular church but what will indirectly stimulate the in-

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terest in the other churches in the locality. Probably in the ordinary type of religious publicity the vicarious element is reduced to a minimum while in the publicity which makes its appeal to fundamental elements in the religious nature the vicarious element must of necessity be large. Such vicarious element ought not to be thought objectionable. In these days we have largely forgotten the boundaries that separate us into various camps known as denominations. Our chief thought is for the Kingdom, and it is for the extension of the Kingdom rather than the aggrandizement of any particular denomination that we are most concerned; so that if a side product of our publicity be the stimulation of other churches in addition to our own, we still rejoice. Even with this vicarious element it is still true that religious publicity appealing to the religious elements of the population will give a full return for the outlay. A

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clientele of regular church attendants will be developed for the advertising church which will be an adequate return for the thought, labor, and funds expended.

The purpose of this study is not to discuss the technic of advertisements, but solely to discover a suitable basis for appeal. But in connection with the consideration of the vicarious element of the publicity a reference to a certain phase of that technic may be in place here. Should there be those who consider the vicarious element of such publicity objectionable, it will still be possible for such to overcome that vicariousness to a considerable degree by the exercise of thought in the working out of the wording of their appeal. There is a law of thought that we, in general, think from a particular thing to the general class to which the thing belongs. We think from the particular Methodist or Lutheran, to the general class *church*. But it is also true that

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we are forward and not backward thinking beings. Starting with the letter B we tend to say C rather than A. From a careful use of these laws we may, indeed, produce advertisements which will largely, unless the application is carried too far, eliminate the vicarious element. To great masses of people all talking machines are Victrolas, all cameras are Kodaks. So insistently have the advertisers of these products used the law of forward thinking, placing the general class first and the particular thing last, that they have brought it to pass that men think of the particular whenever the general class is mentioned. And now these concerns must exercise a careful attention so that the advertisement be directed to show that not all phonographs are Victors and not all cameras Kodaks. In the same way too it ought to be possible for those who feel that the vicarious element is objectionable to so arrange their publicity that the

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vicarious element will be to a large degree eliminated and to make men think from the general idea of church to the particular idea of their own local denomination.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. With church membership barely holding its own in the increasing population, with the church confronted with the problem of the amalgamation of the men who will come back from our armed forces liberalized and with vastly enlarged social standards, some method must be devised to create a new drift to the churches. We believe that the recognition of the elements of power in the publicity we have outlined will provide such a method. Ill pleased with the usual methods of church publicity—advertising the church almost as one would a vaudeville theater or a moving picture place—the writer wrought out his own method to the satisfaction of his own conscience and the enrichment of

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his congregations. A churchgoing constituency which did not depend on chance or special feature, a constituency which grew slowly but surely through the years of experiment and which has continued after a new field of labor was entered upon, was the outcome of the method in practice. In a field rendered difficult by denominational competition and slow to move because of the traditional inertia of the smaller community, it was successful, not sensationally but consistently; and now in a new field of larger possibilities and with diverse problems and population it gives every promise of proving equal to its task as in the first sphere of its efforts.



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